View-Master Historical Reels

By J. Clement

The scenic reels can be considered historical because they document places in the world at a specific time. Likewise the space photos can be science, history, or even scenics. Some packets were released specifically covering historical events. The Bicentennial diorama and cartooned packets cover US history from the revolution to modern times. Other subjects such as the Civil War have been released using pictures from the stereoscopic cards or other 3D formats. The subjects which may be considered historical range from pictures of historical places to presidential inaugurations, royal coronations, papal installations and war pictures. View-Master did bring out packets aimed at being historical, some of which are shown here.

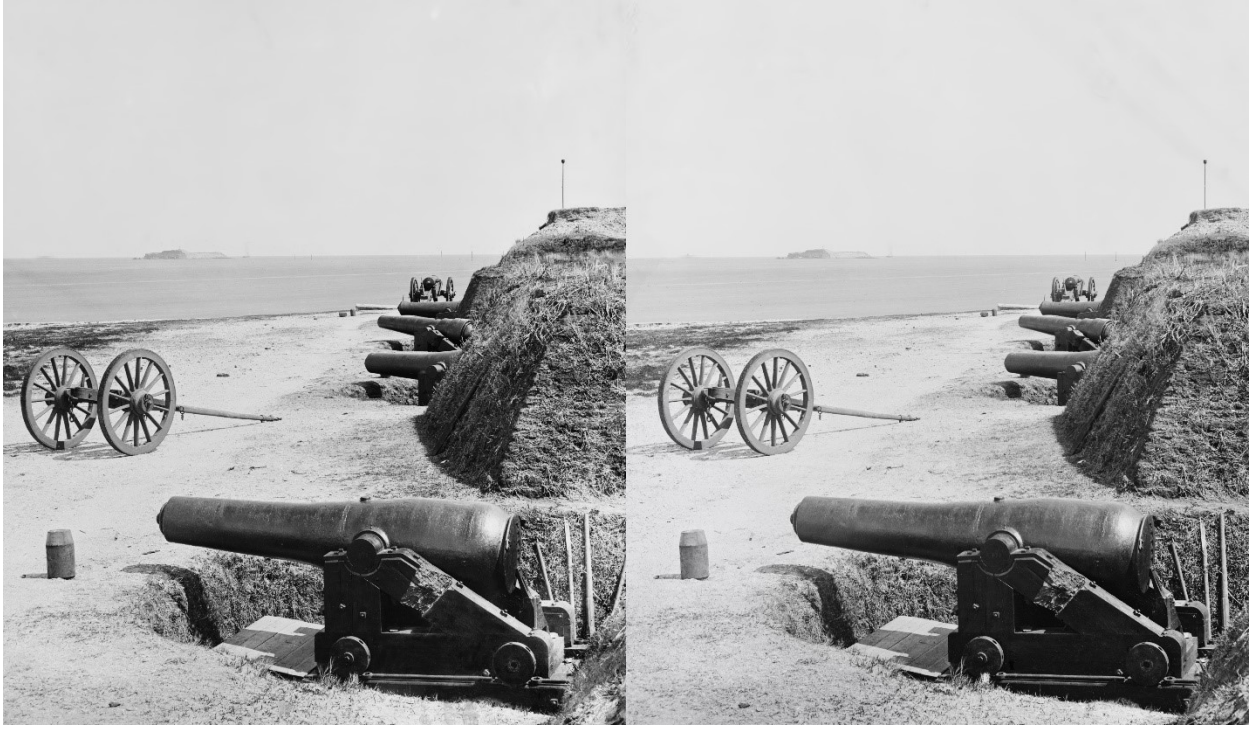
The Library of Congress has many historical 3D cards and negatives that were used for reels. Most people are surprised to learn that 3D photography was extensively used during the American Civil War and the majority of negatives still survive according to 3D photo historians. They also claim that Civil War glass negatives were not used as windows in greenhouses. The Library of Congress has a huge collection of 3D Civil War negatives. Dwight Eisenhower was a 3D photographer and left a large collection of historical 3D photos. Harold Lloyd likewise documented many Hollywood celebrities. View-Master mined a fraction of available 3D photos for some packets.

1975 B7921 1 World War I - Belgium's line of defense before German invasion
Restoration by J. Clement

This is the earliest “historical” set which mined the Keystone collection of stereographic cards. The booklet has a lot of historical text about the war. The pictures are mostly good, but have variable quality, and are all actual historical scenes from the war. The packet had some misspellings. There are no dead bodies in any of the views.

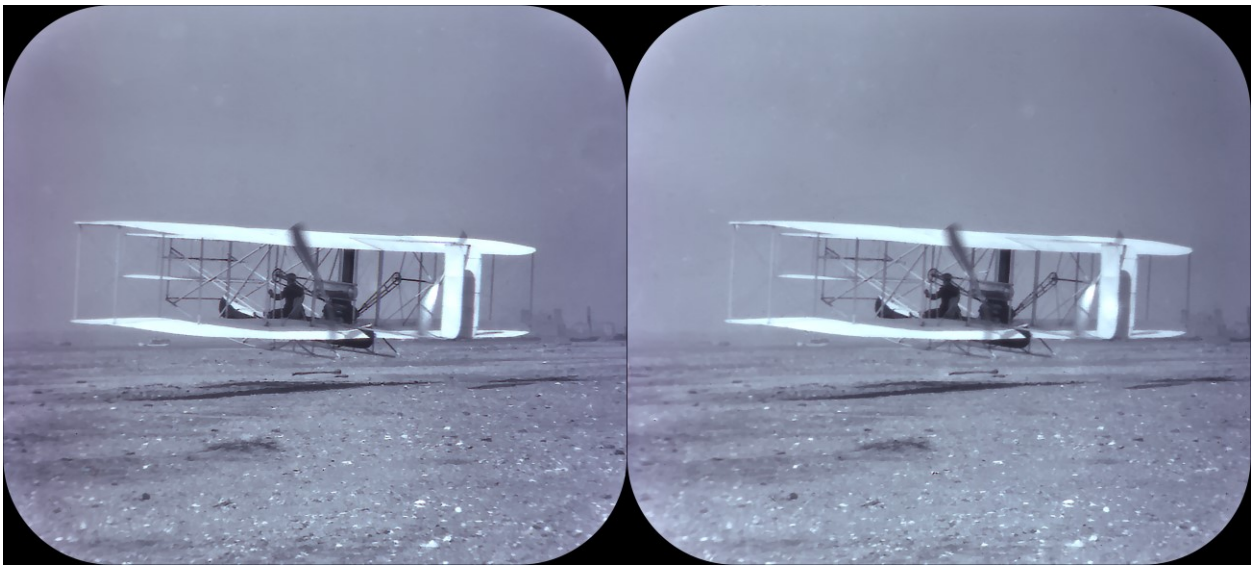
1961 Original reel B7901 War between States 01 Water battery Fort Johnson Charleston Photographer 1865, Barnard, George

This is a restored scan from the “War Between the States” packet released in 1961. The picture was also found in the Library of Congress as the original 3D negative. The reels were published in black and white along with an explanation of the views. Unfortunately this set bowed to Southern sensibilities by ignoring slavery and using the Southern term for the war that is generally called the Civil War. This packet was later republished under the title “The Civil War”. Unlike the newspaper accounts of the day, there are no dead human bodies, but one slightly disturbing scene has dead horses.

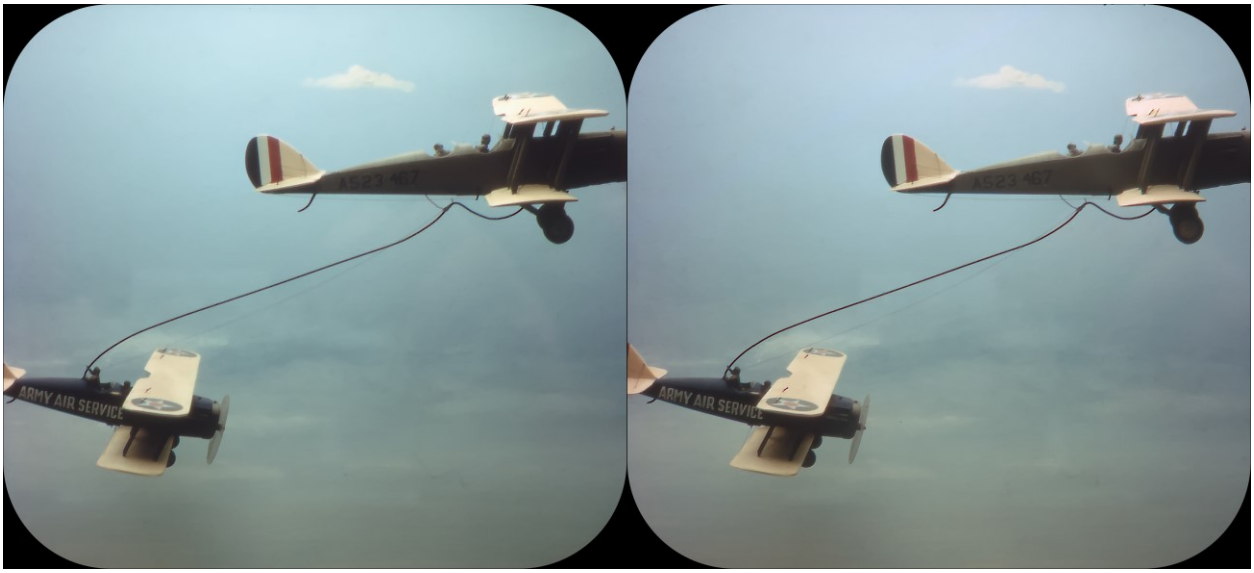


View restored from original negative Water battery Fort Johnson Charleston

The original high resolution negative of Fort Johnson is available on the Library of Congress web site and this is a restored view. Originally this view was published on Holmes-Bates cards. Some views in this packet were taken from the negatives while others were from the published cards.

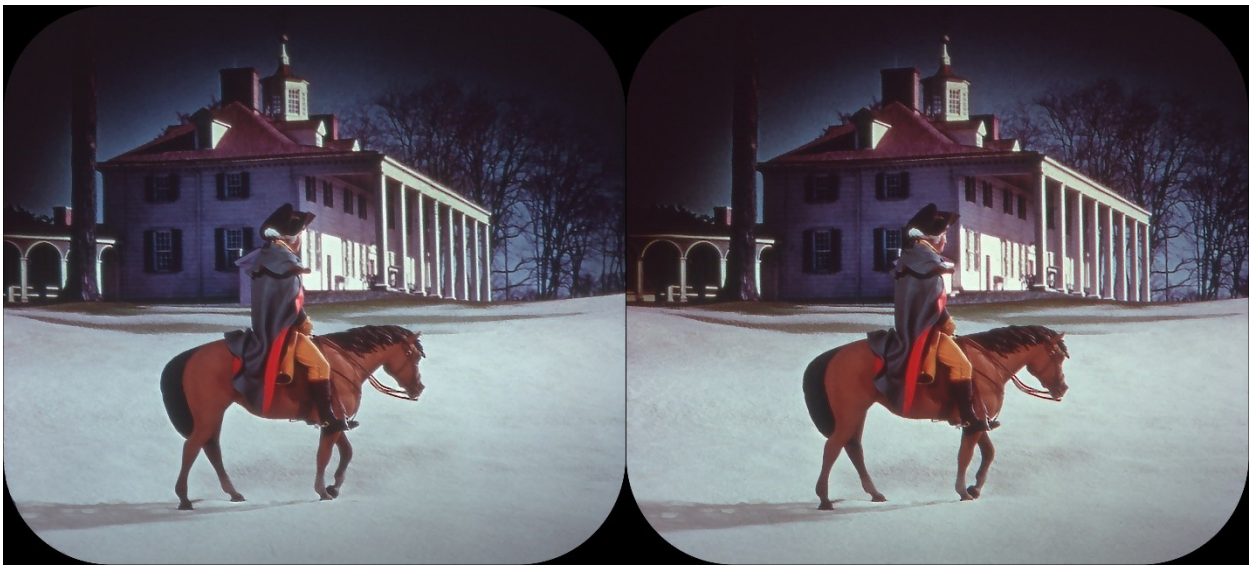


1970 B8651 1 History of Flight - In 1908-1909, the Wright Brothers flew demonstration flights



1970 B8652 4 History of Flight - First aerial refueling demonstration 1923 (uncredited diorama)

The History of Flight has pictures covering the history of flight from 1909 to 1935. The booklet has text and drawing covering the 15th century up to the 1930s. The text was fairly complete for a 16 page booklet. 14 pictures are reproductions from historic stereo cards (stereographs). The other photos show museum exhibits. Two of the same stereographs are also used in the later "Old Time Airplanes" packet. Most of the stereographs were fairly good, but some of the model photos had lighting problems.

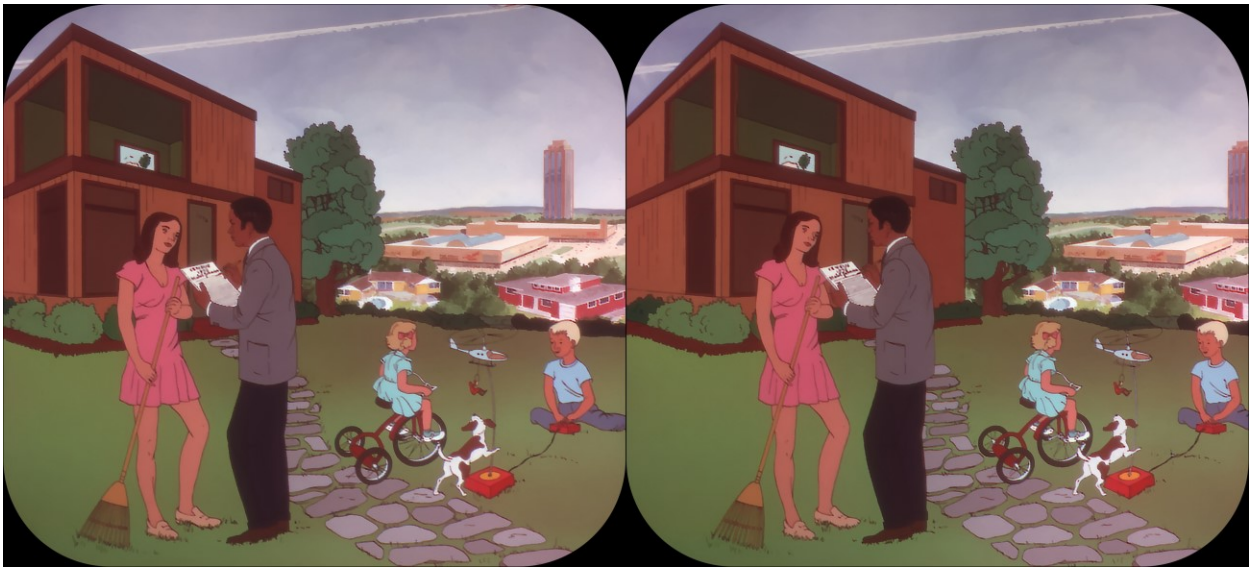


1975 B8103 Revolutionary War 7 With victory won, Washington returned to Mount Vernon

This packet was a historical recreation using elaborate dioramas. It was part of a Bicentennial set of 4 packets that cover highlights in US history. The dioramas were all excellent and the booklet was informative. The rest of the packets were nicely cartooned.

1974 B8111 1 Forging A Nation - Shay's Rebellion in 1787 showed need for strong government

1974 B8121 1 Westward Expansion - Daniel Boone led first settlers into Kentucky in 1775



1974 B8133 7 The 20th Century - 1970 census showed amazing US growth since 1790

The bicentennial reels focused only on US history. Some of the text ignores important contributions of various scientists and engineers. They lead the reader to believe that the US invented everything, and ignores the previous developments that came out of Europe. The quality of the cartoons is excellent.

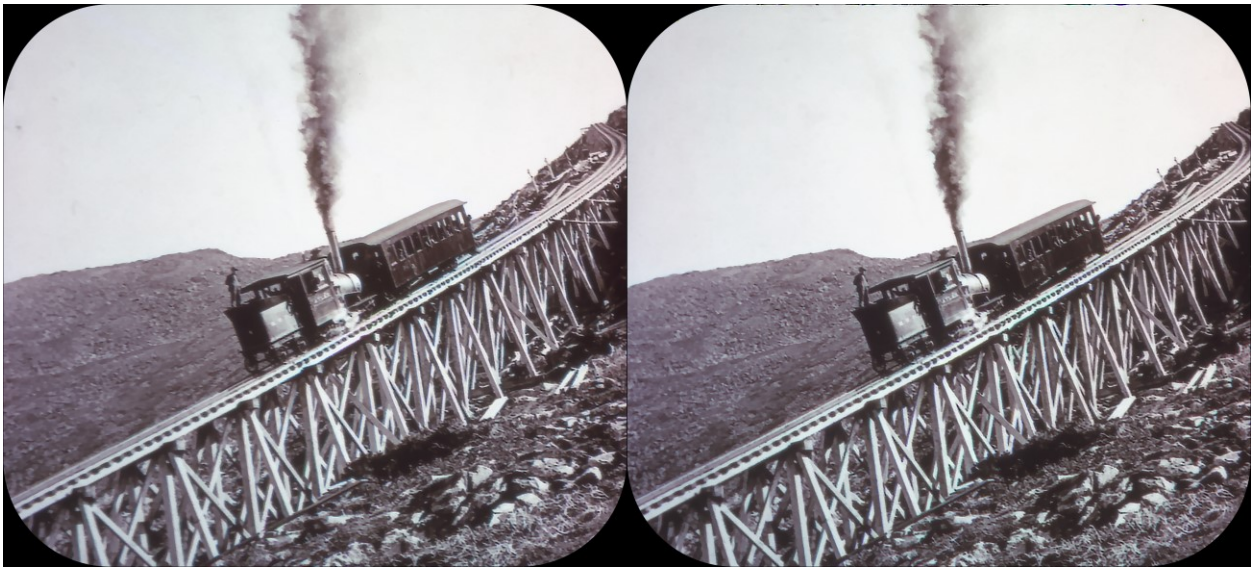
1975 B7932 B5 Old-Time Stereo Famous People - Booker T Washington, famous black educator

This is the first packet in the series of "Old-Time" historical photos. Since stereoscopic photos are only available for some of the significant individuals, this packet does have less significant, but interesting photos of people like Mrs. McKinley, the president's wife. Many of the "Civil War" notables are covered in that packet.

1975 B7931 A1 Old-Time Stereo Famous People –
President and Mrs. US Grant and their son Jesse, 1872

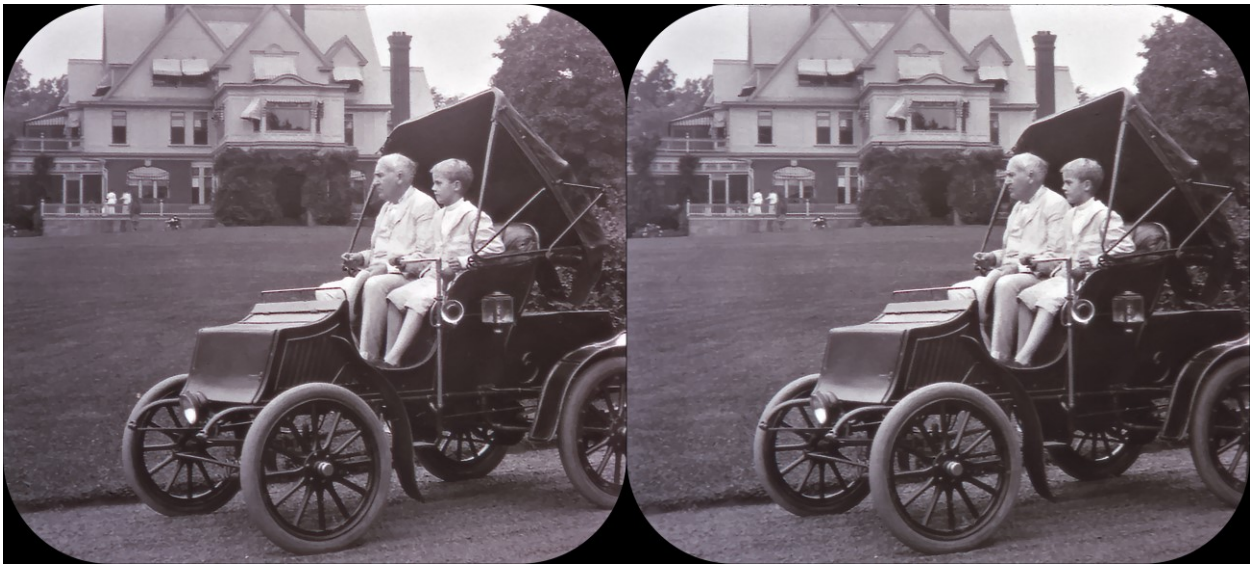
This particular restored picture is actually from a card in the Library of Congress. The View-Master copy was much poorer.

1976 B7941 A1 Old-Time Trains - Union Pacific at 100th meridian

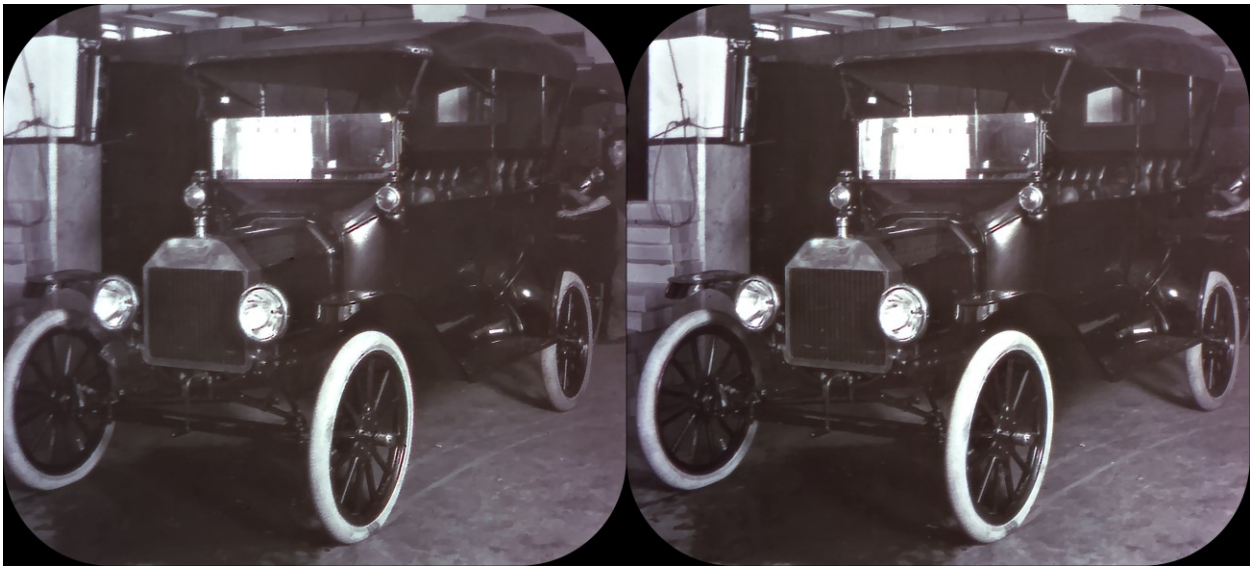


1976 B7943 C5 Old-Time Trains - Climbing Mt Washington

This packet covers trains from the earliest up to the first diesel engines. The earliest trains are shown in museum displays because they were created long before photography. The text is sparse because 8 pages in the booklet are dedicated to pictures.. Packets B794-B797 in the "Old-Time" series have many booklet pages of pictures rather than text.



1976 B7951 A3 Old-Time Cars - Edison's car was steered by tiller
Edison's electric car was killed by gasoline powered cars. But he might have been before his time.

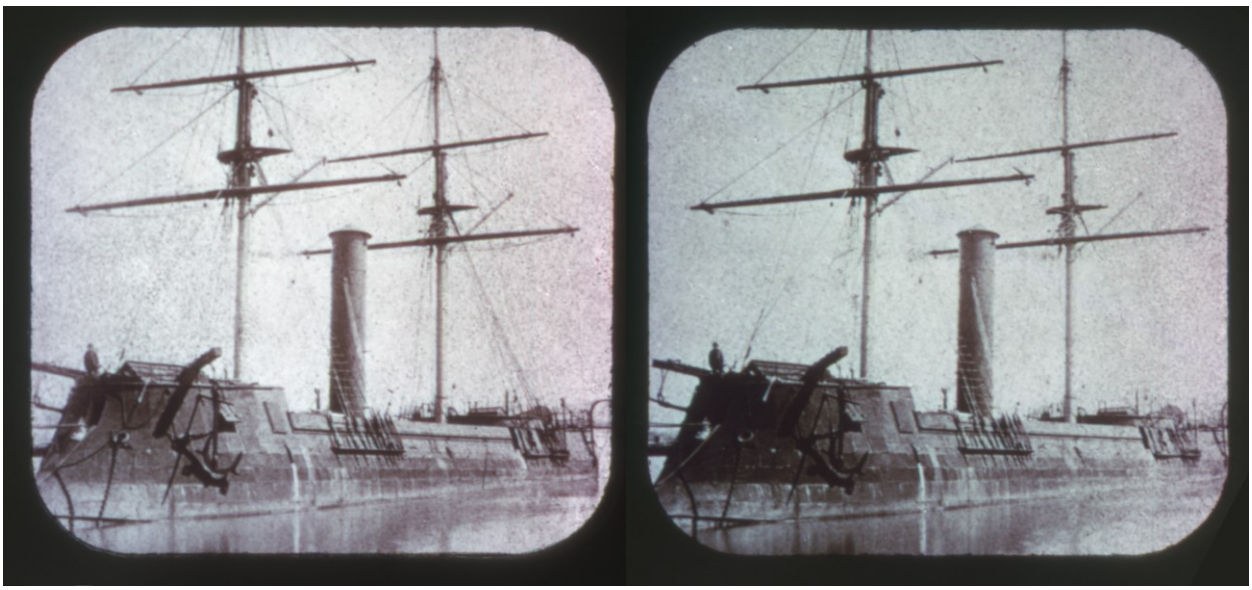


1976 B7952 B6 Old-Time Cars - Finished car; total time, 21 minutes

This packet shows very early cars up through the 1920s and also a single reel mainly dedicated to the Ford assembly line. Dates are sparse and the text is brief.

1976 B796 A4 Old-Time SHIPS - "Old Ironsides"

This series illustrates the progression from sail to steam. Typical of the “Old-Time” series of reels, the images had lots of problems. Often the right and left images had different color balance, and a few had excessive dust, spots, and stains. They apparently used the published cards rather than the original negatives, which contributed to the problems. Most do not have dates for the images, which along with brief text, reduced the historical value.



1975 B796 A5 Old-Time SHIPS - A Confederate iron clad ram (View-Master scan)

This is the scan from the View-Master packet. This was the worst View-Master view in the packet. The large number of spots and obscured details make it fairly murky. The print they copied may have been poor quality.

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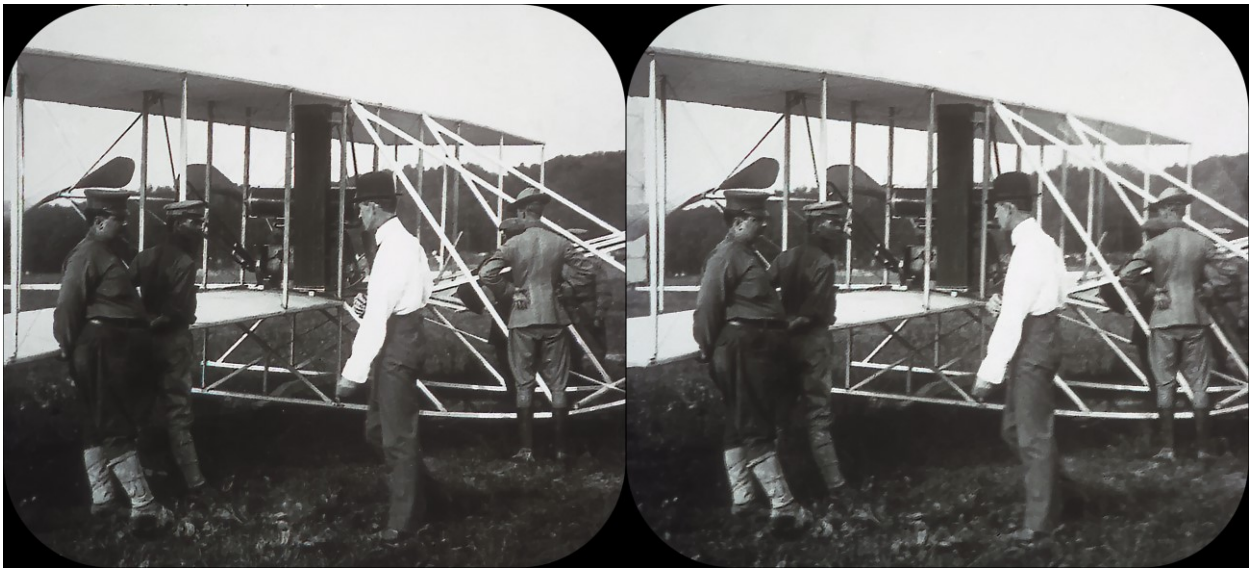
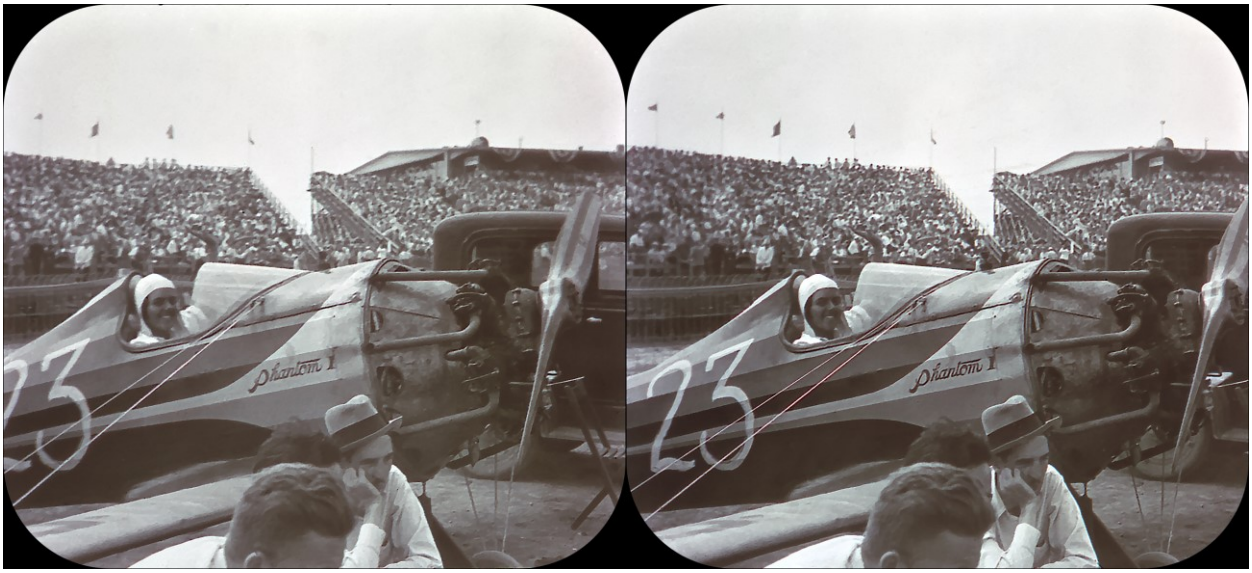
This is a restored copy of the same view found in the Library of Congress. This also shows the important pointed ram on the front that was cropped off in the View-Master copy.



1975 B7971 A2 Old-Time Airplanes - The Wright flying machine

This packet had extremely brief text. This particular picture had very different focus in parts of the scene between the right and left images. One scene of planes over Chicago had one of the images much more out of focus than the other. This may have been characteristic of the original card, but most cards I have seen do not have this problem, so it was probably just poor photography of the cards, or bad quality control. I have seen out of focus occasionally in studio produced reels. The booklet has four scenes in a different order than the reels. The packet includes some whimsical scenes such as a man with personal “wings”.



B7973 C4 Old-Time Airplanes - Miss Florence DeValle

Other than Ann Lindberg, this is the only female in this packet.

Partial list of Historical Reels
All of these are available on unfaded Kodachrome with the exception of H8 which may possibly be available unfaded, but is usually seen on reels faded to magenta. Except for the noted reels the rest are all from black and white stereographs and are monochromatic.

1961 B790 The War Between the States (The Civil War)
1962 B901 Wonders of the World (color dioramas, photos)
1968 B681 Conquest of Space (Color photos)
1969 B663 Apollo Moon Landing (Color photos, Dioramas, 2D photos)
1970 B865 History of Flight (Color & BW photos)
1974 B811 Forging a Nation (color cartoons)
1974 B812 Westward Expansion (color cartoons)
1974 B813 The 20th Century (color cartoons)
1975 B792 World War I
1975 B793 Famous People
1975 B810 The Revolutionary War (color dioramas)
1976 B794 Old-Time Trains
1976 B795 Old-Time Cars
1976 B796 Old-Time Ships
1976 B797 Old-Time Airplanes
1977 H8 Mr. Lincoln (8 images are in 2D)